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### Recommended Citation

Jagla, Virginia M.; Lukenchuk, Antonina; and Price, Todd A. Dr., "Imagining a Better World: Service-Learning as Benefit to Teacher Education" (2010). *Faculty Publications*. 72.  
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## Imagining a Better World: Service-Learning as Benefit to Teacher Education

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### Abstract

This study intends to broaden the conception of service-learning and to expand on its models, epistemological positions, and exemplars. Our intentions are to develop a substantive analysis of service-learning in its current theoretical development and to diversify service-learning pedagogical repertoire for teacher education candidates in graduate education programs. As university faculty, who embed service-learning components in various education courses, we are concerned with the manner in which higher education institutions manage their practices—primarily according to narrowly conceived technical and prescriptive models, thereby restricting multiple ways of knowing, teaching and learning. We demonstrate how service-learning can develop new forms of knowledge in teacher education, the knowledge that challenges the false dichotomy of theory and practice. We appropriate Bourdieu's (1972/1977, 1980/1990, 1984, 1987/1990, 1990/1999) social theory to create a new service-learning model, *Service-Learning Habitus (SLH)* grounded in the ethics of care (Noddings, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007) and responsibility to the Other (Levinas, 1998, 2006). We posit that *SLH* is an alternative service-learning theoretical framework and practice that can enhance student learning outcomes and elevate the status of the teaching profession from a more traditional to a more progressive approach, which promotes activism and engaged learning.

Service-learning has a remarkable history in the U.S. Its roots are grounded in the 1930s' progressive movement in politics, education and social endeavors. During subsequent decades, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement, and the War on Poverty helped shape the ideologies of service-learning. Conceptually, service-learning can be traced to American Pragmatism of C. S. Pierce (1839–1914), W. James (1842–1910), and J. Dewey (1856–1952). Dewey insisted that we learn essentially by and from experience and that education should meet public needs and be responsive to the conditions of modern life. Although Dewey himself never mentioned the term *service-learning*, the pedagogical goals and methods of service-learning clearly find affinity with his philosophy. Progressive education suggests that “service-learning should take the form of education in community organizing and community-building” (Rocheleau, 2004, p. 18).

The National College of Education was founded on progressive pedagogical traditions and we, as graduate faculty, embrace and continue the work of our predecessors. Similarly, we strongly advocate for service-learning, which appears to be a natural outgrowth of our historical roots. Over the past six years, we have been integrating service-learning in coursework. Our recurring engagement in service-learning endeavors with students and colleagues led us to broaden paradigmatic horizons regarding this powerful pedagogy. This paper is a result of our sustained intellectual deliberations and efforts to create original service-learning models and practices that can enhance the benefits of this pedagogy and can stimulate and move forward scholarly discussions concerning service-learning. We therefore propose a new eclectic model, *Service-Learning Habitus (SLH)*, grounded in social theory (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, 1980/1990, 1984, 1987/1990, 1998, 1990/1999) and relational ethics (Levinas, 1998, 2006; Noddings, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007).

This study engages contemporary social theorists, philosophers, educational scholars and practitioners in a dialogue regarding the role of service-learning in teacher education graduate programs. We are guided by the assumption that service-learning should include “deeper understanding of the historical, sociological, cultural, economic, and political contexts of the needs or issues being addressed” (Jacoby et al, 1996, p. 7). Through further discussion and analysis (broadly conceived as a dialogue), we intend to broaden the conception of service-learning in general and to enhance its understanding as transformative practice. Specifically, we would like to diversify service-learning pedagogical repertoire for teacher education candidates. As university faculty who embed service-learning components in middle level, secondary, foundations and research courses, we are concerned with higher education institutions managing their practices primarily according to narrowly conceived technical and prescriptive models, thereby restricting multiple ways of knowing, teaching and learning. We are convinced that an integration of service-learning into teacher education curricula can develop new forms of knowledge, the knowledge that challenges the false dichotomy of theory and practice, the dichotomy that still prevails in the field of teacher education, much to the detriment of a greater understanding, generated from diverse contexts regarding the complexity of the knowledge of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

What follows is the analysis of service-learning in terms of theoretical models, philosophical perspectives, practices, and lived experiences of faculty and students, which altogether extrapolates the *SLH* model.

### **Defining Service-Learning as the Institutional and the Personal**

The roots of our university are embedded in service. Elizabeth Harrison, who, in 1886, founded the college that later became

National-Louis University (NLU), dedicated her life to service and encouraged her students to do the same. She founded NLU as a progressive institution, and we are certain she would be proud of our efforts to promote service-learning throughout the university. We embrace and promote service-learning as an activist, progressive pedagogy and philosophy (Jagla & Lukenchuk, 2009; Lukenchuk, 2009). Although we continue a strong progressive tradition today, our university is vastly different than it was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is currently a commuter school, with the majority of our students in graduate programs. Our undergraduate students are “degree completers” and older than the typical student on a four-year institution’s campus.

Service-learning began at NLU as a single-faculty initiative that has inspired and led many others into a memorable and empowering journey. Comprised of about a dozen faculty members, our Service-Learning Team (SLT) has had a number of significant accomplishments since its inception in 2004. We implement annual university-wide service-learning symposia, model service-learning to our faculty and students through conference participation at local, national, and international levels, as well as through our own social activism. Our service-learning activities and events are documented on our Civic Engagement Center (CEC) website. The website reflects the CEC’s lively and empowering undertakings such as collaborative-action research projects, links among the university and local partners, professional-development sessions with pre- and inservice teachers, and urban school initiatives. Uniquely to the context of our institutional practices, service-learning has received its widest implementation in the National College of Education (NCE). Most of our SLT members are faculty who teach graduate courses in various teacher education programs.

Over the years of our personal engagement in service-learning, we have

internalized many of its existing definitions (reportedly, there exist at least 147 such definitions) and extended its boundaries. As our practice consistently shows, service-learning repertoire is like a fathomless well with living water that nourishes people and communities. We regard service-learning as an “approach to teaching and learning in which service and learning are blended in a way that both occur and are enriched by the other” (Anderson et al, 2001, p. xi). Service-learning, to us, is what Arendt (1998, 2005) calls *vitae activa* and *praxis*—the highest form of human activity; an expression of the condition of plurality, our collective social and political engagement; and an embodiment of critical democratic aspirations and practices. Stemming from our ethical beliefs is the definition of service-learning as an infinite responsibility to others, before ourselves (Levinas, 1998, 2006), expressed through the ethics of care (Noddings, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). We think of service-learning as a “living pedagogy” (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) and as a philosophy of “human growth and purpose, a social vision, an approach to community, and a way of knowing” (Anderson et al, 2001, p. 23). The above conceptions correspond to Billing and Furco (2002)’s notion of service-learning as grounded in interdisciplinary constructs and theories and as a “boundary-spanning activity” having multidimensional capabilities.

Service-learning has been inspirational within the stepping stones of our careers as we teach, research and perform university service. We strongly believe that for our service-learning initiatives to be successful, there “must be a shared understanding of what service-learning is and a commitment by at least some faculty to use it as a teaching methodology” (Stacey & Foreman, 2006, p. 47). As faculty we are “ultimately responsible for providing service-learning experiences for students” (Stacey & Foreman, 2006, p. 47). The pedagogy of service-learning empowers those who participate. In a college of education, we are

responsible for demonstrating this pedagogy to our teacher candidates for use in the K-12 schools in which they will teach. The interdisciplinary nature of service-learning enhances understanding throughout the curricular areas. Students, teachers and community members are affected and influenced in positive ways.

### **An Invitation for a Dialogue**

It has become habitual for us, devotees and practitioners of service-learning, to extend our monthly SLT meetings from their regular agenda to deliberations on service-learning as theory and practice. It is often through spontaneous conversations that we gain valuable insights into service-learning pedagogy. Building on the tradition of dialogism that dates back to antiquity in western philosophy (e.g., Socratic dialogue), we would like to engage diverse voices of contemporary scholars and practitioners in the conversations centered on the issues of service-learning pedagogy in higher education. Socratic dialogue is “characterized by the opposition to any official monologism claiming to possess a ready-made truth” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 81). The ‘truth’/meaning that emerges from Socratic dialogue represents the confrontation of different discourses on the same topic. There are no fixed messages in a dialogue; instead, it represents “the eternal joy of becoming” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 54). We contend that dialogism remains a powerful force to explore the social, the political, and the personal. Therefore, deliberating service-learning through dialogic discourses can both confirm and challenge the existing assumptions of this pedagogy. Although we propose our own version of ‘truth’ with regard to service-learning epistemology, ours is not a privileged position, but rather an attempt to convey what has become ‘known’ to us as contextual and embodied practice.

### **Positioning Service-Learning within the Social and the Political**

Historically and politically, the debates on service-learning have been revolving around justification claims as to what constitutes the proper practice of service-learning. Since interests are essentially contested in American society, the debates inevitably entail deliberations over the interests vested in educational public institutions. For some, the focus of service-learning is external and interpersonal; it “enhances a student’s educational experience, sustains democratic culture, strengthens democratic institutions, and advances social justice” (Abel, 2004, p. 46). Yet for others, service-learning is limited to internal, philanthropic justifications that do not seek to transform societal or educational institutions.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s challenged the institutions of higher education and students to participate in the demands for social justice. As various other forms of experiential education, service-learning established itself on many college campuses in the late 1960s. The movement continued with different levels of success through the 1970s and 1980s. The federal government’s interest and support of service-learning increased in the 1990s with the passage of the *National and Community Service Trust Act of 1990*. The expansion of service-learning programs in higher education has led to the development of multiple models of service-learning pedagogy. The most recent emergence of the civic engagement model broadly addresses the paradoxical role of higher education in the larger society—higher education is part of the larger society and the dominant culture influences education. The civic engagement model is based on the premise that “democracy demands equal participation and voice by all citizens” (Watson, 2004, p. 75). The strength of this model is in its “utility in leveraging the resources of higher educational institutions to address pressing social problems” (Watson,

2004, p. 77). Civic engagement is rooted in the principle of reciprocity that encourages a truly collaborative relationship among community and university partners. Civic engagement “renews and alters the focus of higher education institutions on service as the focal point of their mission of teaching, research, and professional service” and represents a “new voice at the table in discussions of reform within higher education” (Watson, 2004, p. 77).

Similarly, Jacoby et al (1996, 2003, 2009) remind us of renewed purposes of the institutions of higher learning with regard to their civic commitments and claim that colleges and universities can reinforce their public service mission through service-learning (Jacoby et al, 1996). Jacoby et al (1996, 2003, 2009) encourage university faculty to invite communities to academic tents, build successful partnership relationships, and develop high-quality civic engagement experiences for students. The definitions of civic engagement for the purpose of educating students to become civically engaged citizens, scholars, and leaders are “broad and multifaceted” (Jacoby et al, 2009, p. 7). One such definition is provided by the Coalition for Civic Engagement and Leadership at the University of Maryland: “civic engagement is acting upon a heightened sense of responsibility to one’s communities” (Jacoby et al, 2009, p. 9). Service-learning is a course specific pedagogy which fits under the overarching umbrella of civic engagement.

Butin (2005) claims that service-learning “offers the promise of allowing higher education institutions to articulate their missions, to engage students more deeply in the learning process, to develop meaningful relationships with their host communities, and to educate men and women to take leadership roles in a changing world” (p. 203). He thinks that service-learning in higher education is a “potentially transformative pedagogical practice and theoretical orientation” and it is “ideally situated to make an impact in the classroom and in the world” (Butin, 2005, p. vii).

Zlotkowski (1998) echoes Butin in his belief that service-learning “transforms and renews the educational enterprise as a whole” (p. 3). Service-learning activities “foster a sense of community not just with off-campus groups but also among on-campus units—faculty and student affairs staff, faculty and students, and faculty across department lines” (Zlotkowski, 1998, p. 6).

Butin (2005) asserts that service-learning challenges static notions of teaching and learning and exposes links between power, knowledge and identity. It carries the promise for higher education programs geared toward teaching for social justice. Service-learning forces individuals (students, faculty, and community partners) to take a stance. In so doing, “individuals must (consciously or not) define themselves by the decisions they make or refuse to make” (Butin, 2005, p. xi). Butin’s arguments are well aligned with our stances on service-learning and its pedagogical practice, especially in teaching courses such as *Social Justice Perspectives in the History and Philosophy of American Education*. Such practices inevitably challenge our own assumptions of who we are as university faculty and citizens.

The idealism of our beliefs about service-learning as transformative praxis is certainly tempered by the realities of the university’s mundane affairs. We share the concerns with Butin (2005), who so eloquently expresses them in his work: “Tight budgets, federal mandates, limited free time, and the incessant drive to quantify impacts of service-learning [...] challenge the ideal of providing the length of time, space, and dialogue that compels a free-flowing exchange of ideas and thoughts on our self-understanding and identity with professional practice” (p. 201). Those of us who advocate for service-learning and promote this pedagogy among both students and faculty are acutely aware of the trappings of formal institutional structures that can hinder such efforts and prevent us from integrating

progressive practices such as service-learning into larger units of curricula than particular courses. Thus we concur with Butin (2005) that “without [the] deeply seated concept of why it is that we integrate academic and experiential learning, we risk making experience tangential to the academic objectives of the course and, therefore, disconnecting knowledge and experience” (p. 202).

Butin (2005) proposes and discusses in detail the four conceptual models of service-learning: technical, cultural, political, and postmodern. While technical and cultural frameworks focus on pedagogical effectiveness of service-learning, its meaning and practice for individuals and institutions involved, political and postmodern paradigms clearly transform the pedagogy of service-learning from merely functional to activist approaches. The political model focuses on “promotion and empowerment of the voices and practices of disempowered groups in society,” and the postmodern model focuses on “how service-learning processes create, sustain, and/or disrupt the boundaries and norms by which we make sense of ourselves and the world” (Butin, 2005, pp. 90-91).

Does service-learning indeed have the potential for transformation in higher educational institutions’ policies and practices? Which additional to the discussed above models and practices of service-learning can strengthen its status in the educational profession? Service-learning is certainly a “complex concept: social capital, citizenship, democratic participation/practice, public work, [and] political engagement” (Jacoby et al, 2009, p. 6). We further expand on the conception of service-learning through the lens of Bourdieu’s (1972/1977, 1980/1990, 1984, 1987/1990, 1990/1999) social theory of *habitus* and the field theory.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is one of the foremost investigators of the social theory of practice. To him, practice is an everyday activity of people and

institutions, and the approach to practice is by a mode of relational thinking, which is not “simply a middle road between subjectivism and objectivism, but the way to a new area of understanding that sheds light on human practice” (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 57). Relational thinking “focuses on networks or bundles of relationships, such as a field or *habitus*” (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 58). Practices are consequences of interactions between an individual’s historically developed dispositions (*habitus*) and a specific field of contention. *Habitus* is thus a “product of history” and a “system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structure predisposed to function as principles which generate and organize practices” (Bourdieu 1990/1999, p. 442). *Habitus* “makes possible the free production of thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular condition [...]” (Bourdieu, 1990/1999, p. 444).

Bourdieu’s study of practice focuses on how and under which conditions individuals and groups invest their “capital” (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) to enhance their position in a particular field. Practice (“acting-out of roles”) occurs when one’s *habitus* “interacts with the field in which one is engaged” (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 63). Bourdieu describes fields as places of struggle between dominant and subordinate groups, and participants as “players” who enter the game of a particular competition. Players accept the rule of the “field”/ game. No matter what the field may be, the dispositions and strategies (*habitus*) of the actors will influence how they play the game. Practice is therefore motivated by the desire to maximize one’s capital. Bourdieu’s social field model operates at a macro level (e.g., national or global contexts) and at a micro (local) level (e.g., particular groups or settings). Practice, in fact, has a logic “which is not that of the logician” (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, p. 86). Practice requires the principles that are more flexible than the rules of logic: “*Habitus* [...] follows a *practical logic*,

that of the fuzzy, of the more-or-less, which defines the ordinary relations to the world” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 22).

Bourdieu believes that one’s *habitus* is not innate, rather, it is a consequence of socialization by family and friends. *Habitus* is “what enables the institution to attain its realization [...]. An institution [...] is complete and fully viable only if it is durably objectified not only in things [...], but also in bodies, in durable dispositions to recognize and comply with the demands immanent in the field” (Bourdieu, 1990/1999, p. 446). Ultimately, Bourdieu’s intentions, through *habitus*, are to overcome traditional individual-society, subject-object dualism.

Bourdieu’s field theory can be seen as functionalist, and the relationships that he describes as existing among “actors” of a particular “game” are competitive rather than cooperative and hierarchical rather than egalitarian. However, despite its limitations, Bourdieu’s social field theory “has much to offer in terms of portraying complex positioning and interaction. There are boundless ways this model could be developed” (Mutch, 2006, p. 171).

While acknowledging Bourdieu’s substantial contributions to social theory, we choose to adopt the components of it that seem to be most reflective of the purposes and practices of service-learning. Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, in our view, deserves a special merit. *Habitus* is a dynamic construct, and so is service-learning. Like *habitus*, service-learning represents an “embodied history,” a “system of dispositions,” and the way we understand the world. Service-learning as *habitus* is situated within a “bundle of relations” that are, unlike Bourdieu’s, egalitarian and reciprocal. Service-learning “field” of practice is not motivated by the “desire to maximize one’s capital” (as Bourdieu would have it), but instead, it is a dialectic process of constructing knowledge that can challenge and resist oppressive and dominant structures. Bourdieu’s social theory

has inspired our vision of service-learning as *habitus* that represents a web of dispositions and relations that involve people (e.g., university students, faculty, and community members) and institutions (e.g. university administration, units and structures) who attempt to develop the “rules of the game” understood and shared by all participants in order to engage in collective meaningful and transformative praxis and thus to enhance American democracy. To designate such understanding of *habitus*, we coined the term, *Service-Learning Habitus (SLH)*.

Moreover, and while appropriating Bourdieu’s mode of thinking as a middle way between objectivism and subjectivism, we posit that his epistemology lacks the grounding in basic ethics of human agency and human relations, the ethics that we identify as the ethics of care and responsibility to others (see the discussion below). We believe that the ethical dimension can add significantly to Bourdieu’s social theory, which, in turn, can strengthen the *Service-Learning Habitus* model.

### **The Habitus of Service-Learning: Challenges from within Teacher Education Habitus**

Bourdieu’s notions of habitus and practice could be translated into the language of empowering pedagogy. In fact, we think that Bourdieu’s theory can provide a “third way” to teacher candidate development. We have seen and continue to believe that teaching and learning in the field of the “community” gives our teacher candidates the opportunity to encounter, experience, and overcome challenges that are posed, becoming authentic, reflective practitioners in the process. It is in fact our sense that done well, service-learning is a habitus unto itself, creating the means by which aims and ends of progressive education are enabled, beyond that which could take place through either the classroom, clinical hours, or even traditional student teaching periods.

While as we mentioned previously we are continually guided by the assumption that service-learning should include a “deeper understanding” of the issues teacher candidates and faculty face, we are aware, however, of the challenges to implementing service-learning itself, given that the field of teacher education is increasingly buffeted by forces outside of the profession. In other words, we are concerned with these outside forces and strive to develop *SLH* that moves the field of teacher education forward, beyond a fairly narrow framing.

For example, over the last eight years, at least since 2002 with the arguments made in deliberations before the hearings, implementation, and subsequent bids at reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (NCLB), the entire field of education has been considered suspect. This history should provide an insight as to what is currently valued in teaching and learning. Furthermore, much of the Federal Department of Education’s pronouncements during meetings before the *Higher Education Commission* and leading up to this day in widely publicized press events leads the authors of this essay to conclude fairly simply that the profession of teacher education has come under increased scrutiny and, in response, educational leadership has seen fit to initiate profound restructuring.

Much of this restructuring aims at creating what is expected to be the *highly qualified teacher*. Yet researchers like Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Mary Kim Fries (2001), months before the NCLB legislation, in fact argued that teacher education had become victim to a narrowly defined and largely ideological struggle that had little to do with improving the lives of students, despite claims to the effect that such teacher education and public education reforms were in line with social justice (leaving no child behind, for example). These researchers and others argued that teacher education and public education reforms actually had more to do with drawing lines and demarcating positions in a largely



contested field, with the result of, not necessarily coming to a conclusion as to what works best, but greatly placing the field firmly outside of the control of teacher educators, and more in the hands of the government and/or non-profits.

To be specific, Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) argue that the contestation over who manages and controls the teacher education field has fallen down on two lines: one line being those who would advocate significant *deregulation*, so that other alternative certification entities may compete in “teacher training,” and the second line being those who would sustain the traditional teacher education institutions while augmenting the *professionalization* aspects (Cochran-Smith and Fries, 2001) such as intensifying the standards for teacher candidate admission and increasing the number of clinical hours spent by those teacher candidates admitted to the teacher education programs. That demarcation of broad lines of contestation, deregulation and further professionalization, are lines that nonetheless share the implicit and explicit aim of wresting control of teacher education from teacher educators. This *teacher education habitus* has only grown in the post-NCLB era, where the current federal administration seems intent to draw even further on the criticism of teacher education institutions while at the same time calling for increasingly more “rigorous” standards and data systems for measuring progress, not only of the teachers in the field but of the teacher education institutions who credential them.

At the heart of our argument is the idea that while there are insights to be gained by the two ideologies of deregulation and professionalization, both ideologies fall short. The process of preparing a teacher who is fully qualified and effective, is not sufficient; service-learning suggests that empathy and reflection are developed through carefully directed service-learning experiences, and these qualities only enhance the qualified and

effective attributes given such close attention by the federal government and teacher education institutions.

Service-learning, on the other hand, may be the only means of developing the teacher candidate who is empathetic and engaged in the ethics of learning. *SLH* fosters relationships that sustain learning not only for increasing the candidate’s future student’s grade level, but to augment that same student’s love of knowledge, and commitment to social justice means, aims and ends.

### **Positioning Service-Learning within the Ethical**

Dialoguing the essentials of service-learning as theory and practice would not be complete without its ethical dimension. We strongly believe that it is precisely the ethics of service-learning that moves us to action and allows for transformative experiences. One of the misconceptions of service-learning, in our view, is related to seemingly unequal and asymmetrical relationships between “the server” and “the served.” We would argue to the contrary: an essential component of service-learning is “reciprocity between the server and the person or group being served” (Jacoby et al, 1996p. 7). Jacoby et al (1996) define service-learning as a “philosophy of reciprocity, which implies a concerted effort to move from charity to justice, from service to the elimination of need” (p. 9). Similarly, if conceived, for instance, in Arendt’s (1998, 2005) terms as praxis and the condition of plurality, service-learning presupposes “distinctness and equality” that are “the two constituent elements of bodies politic” (Arendt, 2005, p. 62). Arendt claims that we share human sameness, and the shared human sameness is the equality that manifests itself in the absolute distinction of one equal from another. The “server”-“served” relations thus share similar features of distinctness, sameness, and equality.

Service-learning involves an important ethical component that transcends the

limitations of specific circumstances of the recipients of service and those who provide it. The way we conceive of and practice service-learning is deeply grounded in the ethics espoused by Emmanuel Levinas (1998, 2006), the philosopher who has become known for his ethics as the first philosophy. To Levinas, ethics occurs “prior” to essence of being in that we do not exist as absolutely autonomous beings. We are inevitably involved with one another and therefore should feel responsible for each other. It is important to note that during the WWII, Levinas was a prisoner of war in a labor camp for Jewish French soldiers. His parents and siblings were murdered by the Nazis but he survived. In response to the personal and collective tragedy, Levinas returns love for hate—the “wisdom of love” and the humanism of the Other. His notion of the Other does not stand in opposition to Self, but instead presupposes other human beings *like* myself. Each of us ought to feel moral responsibility to and for the other person, which, as Levinas argues, should lead to the demand for justice for all others and for all humanity.

The ethical question is about the compassion of being, an infinite responsibility for other human beings:

Ethics, concern for the being of the other-than-one-self, non-indifference toward the death of the other, and hence the possibility of dying for the other—a chance for holiness—would be the expansion of that ontological contradiction that is expressed by the verb to be, dis-inter-estedness breaking the obstinacy of being, opening the order of the human, of grace, and of sacrifice. (Levinas, 1998, p. 202)

Levinas (2006) asserts that all human beings are equally and reciprocally obliged. There is a fundamental equality and similarity between myself and all other people, maintains Levinas. The way I care for others *is* the way I care for my students. As a teacher, I am in very close

proximity to my students. Students must “feel for” the teacher, argues Levinas; they must identify with him or her. Levinas describes the evolving sense of our true humanity as the process of “awakening,” “sobering up,” the “awakening of our moral obligation” (Levinas, 1998, p. 114). The true selfhood of the self occurs precisely *in and as service*. Stemming from Levinas’s ethics are the very precepts of service-learning, as we conceptualize and internalize this pedagogy in our scholarship and teaching.

Nel Noddings’ (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007) ethics of care echoes Levinas’ philosophy. The pedagogy that Noddings advocates is grounded in the experience of caring relations and happiness: “People want to be happy, and since this desire is well-nigh universal, we would expect to find happiness as an aim of education” (Noddings, 2003, p. 74). Noddings (2003) links happiness to the life of community, democracy, and service: “Community life and a democratic mode of living provide a foundation upon which [the] primary goods are built and thus make a substantial, if indirect, contribution to happiness” (Noddings, 2003, p. 236). Inevitably, service-learning comes to mind as precisely such a mode of living that fulfills us as moral and social human beings, as well as professionals. Noddings reminds us of the importance of the Socratic “know thyself” principle of living, teaching, and learning—what she calls “critical lessons” (2007). The lessons that Noddings alludes to are the incidents of learning from real-life events and occurrences, both pleasant and tragic, and both of which, as Noddings admits, should be introduced and analyzed in school curricula.

Like Levinas, Noddings alerts us of the responsibility and a “demand of *caring for*” (Noddings, 2005a, p. 7); and caring is a “way of being in relation” (Noddings, 2005b, p. 17). Noddings deliberates extensively on the conception of caring relations that extend from people to animals, plants, and the earth, by presenting an argument that “our lives are

interdependent with those of nonhuman animals and plants” (Noddings, 2005b, p. 126). Caring relationship, in its most basic form, constitutes a “connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, of cared-for” (Noddings, 2005b, p. 15). These relationships infiltrate all of our service-learning endeavors as teachers and students care for the elderly and the young, work with community members to better neighborhoods, address issues such as the environment, animals in danger, hunger and homelessness, immigrants, literacy, social change, special needs and disabilities. After all, the essence of teaching is relationships. Teachers and students relate to each other, the curriculum, the environment, the community, etc. Service-learning pedagogy intensifies and elucidates these relationships in worthwhile and meaningful ways.

### **Service-Learning as Living Theory and Practice**

Current scholarship on service-learning in higher education is a testimony to impressive accomplishments of service-learning, community-based projects and research activities launched by university-community partnerships. Programs such as Learn and Serve America Higher Education (LSAHE) testify to their impact on students, communities, and institutions (Gray et al, 1999). Eyler and Giles (1999) present extensive data on national service-learning research projects within higher education. Watkins and Braun (2005) and Zlotkowski (1998) share experiences of successful service-learning programs that have enriched campuses and renewed communities. Strand et al (2003) provide an account of exceptional contributions to the growing community-engagement movement in universities worldwide. Guides for faculty and students for conducting service-learning projects, embedding service-learning in undergraduate and graduate curricula, and creating university programs with a service-

learning component abound (e.g., Cress et al, 2005; Duncan & Kopperud, 2007).

Grounded primarily in pragmatist and constructivist epistemologies, service-learning resembles action and practitioner research and employs its typical data collection and analysis techniques and procedures. Much like action and practitioner research, service-learning engages persons in real-world ideas and practices and seeks to “generate living theories about how learning has improved practice and is informing new practices” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p. 13). Strand et al (2003) draw parallels between community-based and action and participatory research that illustrate “historical distinctions concerning the political nature of the research enterprise and the degree of active participation of the community in the research” (Strand et al., 2003, p. 4). Community-based research is a “collaborative enterprise” that “validates multiple sources of knowledge,” promotes the use of “multiple methods of discovery and dissemination of the knowledge produced;” and has as its goal “social action and social change for the purpose of achieving social justice” (Strand et al., 2003, p. 8). Action research projects represent the “form of social inquiry” that “link education to citizenship” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 11).

Our personal engagement in service-learning allows for the most intimate experience of listening to the people who “communicate their ideas as theories of real-world practice, by explaining what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what they hope to achieve”; and their personal histories as “living theories that they develop and generate about their practice” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p. 13). We employ practitioner and action research elements to launch our service-learning projects and initiatives grounded in the “epistemology of practice” (Strand et al., 2003, p. 11), the knowledge that is “actively constructed by the learner” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 64), and the

knowledge as “civic responsibility and public work” (Zlotkowski, 1998, p. 4).

As a result of our recognition by Illinois Campus Compact as an “Engaged Teacher Education Department” during the 2008-09 academic year, we totally embedded service-learning pedagogy into two of our urban education programs in the National College of Education. All teacher candidates in our Teach for America (TFA) (alternative certification) program and half of our candidates in our Academy for Urban School leadership (AUSL) (Urban Teacher Residency) program produced actual service-learning projects within their middle and high school classrooms. Our teacher candidates coached and worked alongside their middle and high school students within community organizations to truly reconceptualize the notion of learning in these urban teacher education programs. Both of these programs recruit and place teachers into underperforming Chicago public schools. The urban education candidates have acquired a wealth of experience and now have a good conception of what these types of projects entail. They have experienced firsthand the integrative properties of the pedagogy of service-learning and are ready to fine tune such ideas in future classrooms. As one of the AUSL residents put it, “I have decided to make service-learning a staple in my future curricula and will be an advocate for the acceptance and growth of the service-learning movement... an educator is responsible for one thing: finding the most relevant, efficient, and meaningful ways to teach children, to enlighten young people, and inspire our future leaders.”

Perkins et al (2006) admit that for many students graduate education is “distant from their lived experiences. The personal is severed from the professional in order to train graduate students to become ‘professionals in the field.’ Service-learning provides a “useful bridge for graduate students, helping them merge their personal growth with their professional growth” (Perkins et al, 2006, p. 45). One of the most

perceptible outcomes of the use of service-learning within urban settings is that this pedagogy instilled motivation in the students who participated. For example, one TFA corps member remarked, “I’d like to highlight Sam’s (high school student reflection). He’s at a 3rd grade reading level, he’s in and out of jail, known for his gang affiliation - and some of the things he said were really special... And every day: ‘Ms. T., when are we going out to the garden? I’m staying after school today Ms. T.’. It was really cool.”

Service-learning also strengthens the leadership skills of those students involved. An AUSL resident reflected that, “giving older students the opportunity to teach the younger can really reinforce the content and also help build confidence in some students who do not always feel successful with traditional assessment... (We) first took note that peer mentoring helped students, the mentor and the (younger students learning from them).” This was surprising because it was not something that these instructors had planned for. “Some were being helped academically, while they were helping their mentor socially.” A high school student involved in a project led by a TFA member shared the point of view, remarking “I learned that these kids can learn if they see teenagers as role models”.

Another byproduct of student leadership is the sense of community that is created within schools and between adolescents. When a TFA member asked the high school students what they enjoyed most about reading to elementary children at another school, one student replied “I think what was best was when the students really showed respect and really enjoyed me being there”, while another added, “Kids can teach you something too!” An AUSL resident found that a similar project “also gave more meaning to the books for the 3rd graders as they were able to read about the author and learn a little bit about life as a 6th grader.” Research tells us that middle and high school students who

participated in service-learning tutoring programs increased their grade point averages and test scores in reading/language arts and math and were less likely to drop out of school (Supik, 1996; Rolzinski, 1990).

An important goal of any service-learning endeavor is applied learning. In response to the question “What do you think you can do in your own classroom or community with the information that you acquired from the presentation?” a student said “I can recycle more appropriately and at home.” Also on the topic, an AUSL participant reflected on a project about plant life, wild life, the local ecosystem and the effect of an invasive species on that system. The resident remarked, “it was a hands-on experience that allowed the students to learn, have fun and play a hands-on role in preserving a valuable piece of nature in their community.” Perhaps most powerful is this account of a math project: “The first part of this project seems to have been accomplished because the students seemed interested in applying math concepts to real life issues.” Studies have shown that students who participated in high quality service-learning programs displayed an increase in measures of school engagement and achievement in mathematics than their peers in control groups (Melchior, 1999).

As an extension to applied learning, students can also find meaningful connections between the service-learning project curriculum and their surroundings. This idea is exemplified by a TFA participant’s comments: “I’ve never seen my students so engaged, ever. I think they realized they made a lot of different connections. They made connections to their community when they heard poets talking about making those connections. They made connections to their own lives. They just began to write - I’ve never seen them write.”

### **Concluding Thoughts**

As we ponder the relevance of service-learning issues to higher education, we come to

a clearer realization that they represent a cohesive web of relations and practices embedded in multiple theoretical, socio-cultural, ethical and political perspectives which, in turn, establish the context of shaping our identities as faculty and persons capable of undertaking the kind of service that allows us to develop with our students as we strengthen our practice. Service-learning, once integrated in the programs that prepare teachers for their service in increasingly diverse American classrooms, can be an effective pedagogical strategy that brings vigor to the practice of ‘clinical hours’ required of future teachers. By engaging in service-learning, a teacher candidate breaks away from the traditional role of a ‘observer’/ ‘spectator’ (albeit an important role) thus appropriating the role of an ‘actor’ through direct involvement in the pedagogical practices within or outside the formal curricula—the role that is exceedingly liberating, empowering, and having the potential to personalize and transform teacher-learner relations.

Our teacher candidates testify that service-learning experiences “take social justice out of the realm of academic, theoretical discussions and into the realities of the lives of people” (Lucas, 2005, p. 172). Service-learning supports the acquisition of effective multicultural education by “allowing preservice teachers to become familiarized with diverse communities, families and children in contexts outside of school and thereby providing them with the skills needed for effective community collaboration” (Anderson et al, 2001, p. 93).

Service-learning conceived as an alternative pedagogy based on caring relations and an acute sense of ethical responsibility for the other has the potential to transform teacher education curricula and pedagogical practices from more traditional to more progressive, collaborative, and creative, as well as to elevate the status of the teaching profession to a more authentic and honorable public service. Service-learning may serve as a

new scholarship of engagement, in which service-learning and other forms of civic engagement are intrinsic to the faculty roles of teaching, research, and professional service. Civic engagement once embedded in the very core of the mission and nature of higher educational institutions has “potential for addressing a crisis of community, the crisis that signifies social, political, intellectual and moral fragmentation” (Hoppe, 2004, p. 147).

The mode of thinking and conceptualizing service-learning that we propose as a major contribution to its theory and practice is the *SLH* model grounded in Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* and the field theory. The *SLH* model reflects Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* as an alternative, “third way” (between objectivism and subjectivism) of conceptualizing service-learning. It internalizes a cohesive nature of service-learning that seeks both to deliberate *and* act on one’s dispositions, whichever these might be. Service-learning pedagogy represents the “field” of contending views and practices. Yet, at the same time, the “players” involved in this pedagogy ought to share the “rules” of the “game” to accomplish any endeavors. Unlike Bourdieu, we do not regard the relations among the “players” as competitive with the purpose to maximize the profit. Even though the profit, under certain circumstances, can be for the sake of all involved in the game, we count on the practice of service-learning that challenges *and* transforms hegemonic structures of institutions, groups, and individuals. Our intentions are to “humanize” Bourdieu’s social capital theory by situating service-learning as *habitus* within the ethics of caring and responsible relations exemplified in the philosophies of Levinas and Noddings.

It is precisely because of our service-learning engagement as lived experience that we have come to appreciate and enact service-learning as *praxis*—the highest form of human activity. As a counterpoint of social escapism and nihilism, service-learning is a life-giving

force that seeks an outlet to move, touch, change, and transform people’s lives. Serving others brings forth our humanity which is defined by our responsibility to and care for other human beings. Serving others reawakens our sense of true selfhood and shows not what we are but what we ought to be—sources of infinite compassion and reciprocal solidarity. Those who choose service-learning over other socially engaged activities, share the understanding of service as a moral obligation that supersedes prescribed professional duties and expectations.

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